This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

Claims 1-19 (canceled)

Claim 20 (new):   An isolated DNA expression construct comprising a DNA sequence represented by a general formula selected from the group consisting of:

$$p/o - (A)_n - R_y, \text{ and}$$

$$p/o - R_y - (A)_n$$

wherein

i) p/o is a *Lactobacillus delbrueckii* subsp. *lactis* promoter that is SEQ ID NO: 9,

ii) A is a heterologous gene encoding a polypeptide of interest; and

iii) R is a gene encoding the *Lactobacillus delbrueckii* subsp. *lactis* lac repressor protein that is SEQ ID NO: 2;

and wherein n denotes an integer ≥ 1 and y denotes 0 or 1.

Claim 21 (new): The DNA expression construct according to claim 20 wherein y is 1.

Claim 22 (new): The DNA expression construct according to claim 20 wherein the reading frame of the gene coding for the lac repressor is reserved relative to the region p/o.

Claim 23 (new): The DNA expression construct according to claim 20 wherein the gene coding for a polypeptide of interest is selected from the group consisting of genes encoding enzymes, cell surface proteins, and functional peptides.

Claim 24 (new): The DNA expression construct according to claim 23 wherein the gene coding for the polypeptide of interest is selected from the group consisting of genes coding for dextransucrase, glycosyltransferase, phytase, transglutaminase, peptidase, phenylalanine ammonia lyase, protease, cell surface antigens, bacteriocins, hormones and insulin.

Claim 25 (new): An isolated DNA expression construct according to claim 20 that is devoid of catabolite responsive elements.

Claim 26 (new): An isolated DNA sequence encoding the lac repressor protein of *Lactobacillus delbrueckii* subsp. *lactis* as indentified by SEQ ID NO: 2 or functional variant thereof.

Claims 27 (new): A recombinant microorganism transformed with a DNA expression construct according to claim 20.

Claim 28 (new): The recombinant microorganism according to claim 27 wherein the recombinant microorganism is a gram positive bacterium.

Claim 29 (new): The recombinant mircroorganism according to claim 27 wherein the recombinant microorganism is a lactic acid bacteria.

Claim 30 (new): The recombinant microorganism according to claim 27 wherein the DNA sequence is incorporated into a microorganism's chromosome.

Claim 31 (new): The recombinant microorganism according to claim 27 wherein the DNA sequence is transformed in a plasmid maintained extra-chromosomally.

Claim 32 (new): The recombinant microorganism according to claim 27 wherein the DNA sequence is a plasmid.

Claim 33 (new): A method of producing a polypeptide comprising the steps of:

transforming a host cell with an isolated DNA expression construct comprising a DNA sequence represented by a general formula selected from the group consisting of:

$p/o - (A)_n - R_y$, and

$p/o - R_y - (A)_n$

wherein

    i) p/o is a *Lactobacillus delbrueckii* subsp. *lactis* promoter that is SEQ ID NO: 9,

    ii) A is a heterologous gene encoding a polypeptide of interest; and

    iii) R is a gene encoding the *Lactobacillus delbrueckii* subsp. *lactis* lac repressor protein that is SEQ ID NO: 2,

and wherein n denotes an integer ≥ 1 and y denotes 0 or 1; and

    culturing the host cell under conditions favorable to the expression of the polypeptide of interest.

Claim 34 (new): The method according to claim 33 wherein the DNA sequence is transformed in a plasmid maintained extra-chromosomally.

Claim 35 (new): The method according to claim 33 wherein expression is performed in a gram positive microorganism in presence of lactose.

Claim 36 (new): The method according to claim 33 wherein expression is performed in a lactic acid bacteria in presence of lactose.

Claim 37 (new): The method according the claim 33 wherein the DNA sequence is incorporated into a microorganism's chromosome.

Claim 38 (new): A method for the production of food products comprising the steps of:

    transforming a host cell with an isolated DNA expression construct comprising a DNA sequence represented by a general formula selected from the group consisting of:

    $p/o - (A)_n - R_y$, and

    $p/o - R_y - (A)_n$

wherein

    i) p/o is a *Lactobacillus delbrueckii* subsp. *lactis* promoter that is SEQ ID NO: 9,

    ii) A is a heterologous gene encoding a polypeptide of interest; and

iii) R is a gene encoding the *Lactobacillus delbrueckii* subsp. *lactis* lac repressor protein that is SEQ ID NO: 2,

and wherein n denotes an integer ≥ 1 and y denotes 0 or 1; and

using the host cell in the production of food products.